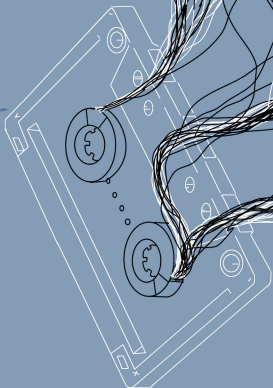


CAKETRAIN

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Editor-in-Chief **Donna Karen Weaver**

Assistant Editor **Amanda Raczkowski**

Layout Designer **Joseph Reed**

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Velocity

I.

The velocity of a bullet
is computed by distance
traveled (also known as
space) then divided by time.

The velocity of being on the
receiving end of said bullet
can also be determined
but once received is hardly
worth the calculated effort.

Furthermore, the argument
that my bullet is faster than
your bullet hardly matters
if you are the one being shot.

II.

The velocity of a rainbow
includes color plus the pot
of gold at the end of it.

Whereas a bullet has an
intended target a rainbow
always appears to be an
accident of nature. This is
usually never repeated
except once when driving
from Palm Springs 3 (three)
rainbows magically sprouted
simultaneously from the sky.

Awestruck, we (as a race) like
to be hit by rainbows. They do
not hurt or puncture and always
make you feel lucky or blessed.
Additionally, there is nothing

frustrating about rainbows as
they are not known to kill.

III.

The velocity of a blowjob
must be gauged by the amount
of flourish and embellishment
as practiced by the artist.

Thus oral interpretation
and its variances inevitably
increase velocity with the
intended target being orgasm.

Tangibles like length and girth
divided by time of intended
approach to orgasm plus
above factors provide speed
of said blowjob.

Finally, there are other factors
or qualities when entered into
the equation such as lip thickness
tongue adeptness, depth of activity, etc.
help determine the proper ratios
of time and motion.

But being on the receiving end
of a blowjob is much like the being
on the receiving end of a bullet
-- who really cares about its velocity.

IV.

The velocity of friendship
is easily and readily figured
without disturbing factors
of weather or acts of god.

The speed of friendship
is simply determined

by acts of profundity
mixed with consistency
divided by reliability
plus most importantly
the willingness to take said bullet
whatever its velocity
for said friend.

C o l e t t e L a B o u f f A t k i n s o n

R o o f t o p P i c n i c

Roasted chicken and white wine I wouldn't touch. With my finger on the Channel Islands, I named them – already bored – for him. His father called from Trieste. From the roof, I tried to translate what climbed out the window. *Da*. It was good to forget the road I loathed four floors below, the ocean out there.

At sundown, a turkey vulture stretched over me, showed his underside, lunged for the half-eaten chicken. *Take it*, I thought, the bones, the boy, my fake interest.

On Corsica, later, the boy flew out of a chair, the blood in his head spreading from its course.

I didn't cry. I thought of the vulture, turned myself toward birds.

Independence Day, 1970

With young backyard drunks at dusk, we held sparklers and burned glow worms. Then came the fizzed out collapse of the failed, big show. Smoke filled the patio. To water we went caravanning to seashore. I would have held anyone's hand. Past the rail we fished, an ice cream stand, and candy store where kids chewed and chewed taffy, two men tumbled down a flight of stairs and landed in our path. My father gathered me. One man tore the other's face open. Their white, summer shirts turned red. Between punches, two women arrived. They pulled each other's hair.

The drunks and I, twisted away from the direction we came, watched. I perched against my father like birds on the stump in Brueghel's painting. In it and from above, immobile tropicals observed others fly or crawl without aim toward the ark. To them – unthinking – the cypress, motion, and uncountable pairs felt like signs of an incident to come.

The next day I was sure both men had died. With legs still around my father's waist, memory became docked in the rotting, wood pier. The holiday let me see all in one eyeful, and I understood myself far from being spared.

Camille Dungy

Commute

You remember the harp in your pocket and the tune
to a time winding blues. *Baby, I'm tied to you*

forever. I'm tied to you forever. I can't quit you, baby.
I can't even put you down. This tunnel looks like love

gone hurtling into darkness. Across the track
a couple nods, appreciating something they can't

put their fingers on. You tuck the harp back in your pocket,
and we're all quiet for awhile but the wind.

The Abattoir

Who was he to think that because we were once friends,
before the glasses, and the neck-gear, and the growth
so fast even his new clothes hung short, that we would
risk the shoot of laughter dropping us beside him?

Who was he to think his gentle invitations,
the dance his grace-poor father risked embarrassment
to afford, could inspire our mercy? We were
butchers, knives unsheathed, our cleavers at the ready.
We were young and strong and starving. That thing, that bone

and skin and meat behind the altar? Just one girl
went, because she had to go. Her mother drove her
to the temple and watched her walk inside. But us?
The winter of adolescence was upon us.
Who was he to think his was a life we would spare?

Mary at the Shops

When his hands only had her to hold, and he sought something
more practical (*perhaps some sturdy shoes?*), Mary found them.

The perfect pair.

The box she held held the shoes the man she wanted wanted
and everything she would not say about the ways she would change, the secrets
she could keep, the articulate and inarticulate desires of his heart
she would make manifest and, finding, give to him.

She placed in his hands the shoes
and thought that everything was understood.

He thanked her,
opened the box, and inside found just the pair of shoes he wanted.

it had been months on months

so how it surprised her,
with \$4.68 of Mr. Brown's Chicken,
one thigh left in the bucket and
grease glowing on lips and around
them and hands lardlined
and crumbed and paper napkins not
paper but a limpness in one palm,
to find herself at Mary's mother's
stoop. and there was Mary sitting
with her head also sitting (it sat
in her hands. she sat in the almost
dark beside the ivy wall lining
the stairs that would have walked
her to the bell, the door. she would
not ring). even after cleaning
as best she could the mouth that reminded
her of another time when Mary sat
in bed with silly sticking all around
hair and looked at her with what Sarah

only hoped meant thank you, Sarah
did not say anything. and Mary did not
lift any part of herself (not like
that other time when her whole self
she lifted up to Sarah). not even,
not especially, her head, to see Sarah
standing where she never knew
not to go, so close to the doorbell
Mary couldn't ring. (the mother
didn't think women should ever be
like that). together Mary and Sarah
only were still. and then, not
because she wanted to but because
she knew she could never take
any chance again, even to stand
at Mr. Brown's Chicken and say six
special seasoned thighs please
if Mary didn't answer right, Sarah
took her body further down the street
and finally and without a doubt away.

Meanings

1.

Her eyes are called her hands,
the table is labeled a limestone quarry, this pen
a cubic foot of air, hearts are shelled
pecans she is cracking.

 In the library she hunts
dust-eaten shelves
for dictionaries. On their ink-fattened pages,
death is the moment
rain hangs in the air.

Her father died a simile.
She burns her grief page by page.

2.

She dreams the coffin shut,
her father angled against the wall,
Until you say the words,
I am still alive.
His voice congeals the air
like full-scented flowers.

The coffin becomes the wrinkled edges of the carpet,
the bright faces of the mourners.
When she was little, her father, stiff-backed,
paper before him open as a plate,
looked, unmoving,
on weekday mornings.
Her relatives ignore her,
the corpse closes its eyes.

T h e F u n e r a l

He died in the English way, quiet and unassuming.
The car was found arranged by the roadside,

the body inside decorously sprawled, all evidence
of wounds soaked into his black jacket.

One arm politely covered his face. His joints rested
at embarrassed angles. The seatbelt sagged

like a guilty child when the door was pried open,
when ambulance lights lit through unbroken windows

to reflect on the moving hands of his watch.

A f t e r t h e C r e m a t i o n

Morning peoples the kitchen with thin shadows.
Trees stand at the windows, their bark polished

to a mottled gray as breakfast curdles
among the white bouquets cluttering the table.

Cradling the urn, I feel the awkwardness
of the bones inside and miss the dissonant

scent of ash. Coffee suffuses the air.
I drink it scalding, as if to label myself alive.

Mercedes Lawry

Roaming Summer

We were sweatballs. Watched it drip
behind our knees. Pushed hair off our necks.
Coveting shade and the front porch, we knew
time as a long, thin line that wavered
just above the horizon. The future was invisible,
our own selves grown and careful, who
would we love? Little did we know how delicious
those summers were, our brown legs perfect,
our hunt for dimes that took us up three blocks
to the corner store and Dreamsicles that made us
truly happy. The whole world was interesting
and even though we were afraid of Mr. Khrushchev,
we felt mostly safe even while telling the same
scary stories when we slept outside and watched for Sputnik,
our heavy eyes fastened on the spaces between stars.

Help, I'm Running Backward and It Feels So Good

Little or no reason for the sugar plantation.
Happiness gave up and went home.
Something about a pepper tree or cheatgrass.
The elderly man is trying to pray, but whispering
in his ear is a badly dressed ghost.. "Too late,"
it says, its voice like broken zippers, "too late."
I was in third grade once though no one will believe it.
I have the valentines as proof, and none of those cheap,
corny little ones, a hundred in a pack.
There were too many candles. I sent out invitations.
They said NO CANDLES in 16pt. Book Antiqua.
Oh, the days I myself feel like an old book,
it's not too bad. Keep your eye on the moon,
soon it will be gone and you'll be called a liar.

Leopard, snake, alligator

Take the meat on your tongue
and talk its language: wind,
thunder, death out of nowhere.

Prison of flesh, shell stretched and folded,
eager to fail. The fame has invisible rules.
Go to the zoo and laugh. Touch
your own face, arm held out,
hand open. Supplication takes small
breaths. There is no eye to eye,
toe to toe, love, hate, misunderstanding.

Dream the gorillas take you in.
Of course, you're grateful, you've never
slept so well. But you're still the outsider
babbling useless syllables while the fierce rain
cleans your skin and leaves you shivering
under a pale, white sun.

c a c t U s m a y

m y b r o t h e r o w n s a b o a t

my brother owns a boat
he's probably in it right now
floating on the bird-blue water
the biggest boat
on the shimmery lake
not a cloud in the sky
a drink in his hand
the ring on his girl's finger
sparkling large enough
to cause fishermen on shore
to squint into the distance

right now
i am crowded into a one-room apartment
with a graduate degree, a thousand
dusty tomes and
a cat with fleas
there's a drink in my hand
sweaty beads of light cling to the glass
glittering in the florescence
like the stars of an obscene
constellation

i'm not sure this means anything
if anything means at all

beyond the simple fact
the quality of light
matters only
to the living

i am still trying to decide

i am still trying to decide
whether my mother was a slave or an angel
and whether my father was master of his house
or just a drunk stuck in his chair

i am trying to figure out how to lay my head
so that i do not wake up my father
and whether my father is a chair
or my chair a type of father

my mother is trying to find her feet
she is too drunk to fly but someone must make dinner
and i am unsure whether my father is motioning to speak
or for another drink

and every time i draw near i wake up behind his red eyes
with an ashtray tongue and my pockets turned out

the oven is never turned on and the casserole is served
the flowers are mowed over and
a load of colors are bleached to threads

the meatloaf is raw
my mother weeps and my father catches himself
on fire

my mother does not yet know that i have become my father
and looks at me sidelong as if i might save her
the meatloaf is raw and father is motioning for a drink
eat it he says

and i pray to my mother on the patio smoking
i am still trying to decide if that prayer was answered

T h e N e w T r a n c e n d e n c e

The last time I was blindfolded, led from the city
by Mitzvah tank, Venus in retrograde eclipsed the moon.

Silicone was up, the Dow down, the season's rage reality
television. Later I would learn there was Teffillin on board,

but by then it was too late, more Republicans had ascended,
wiry hairs had begun to peek from my palms, the spring

breeze chockablock with burnt wieners and aerosol.
When squads of surgeons quit Mount Sinai to practice

laser vaginal rejuvenation, there's bound to be a fuss
that reaches far enough into Florida to upend bingo,

to turn the links into a place Camaros go to rust.
See: we're all in this together. It's up to us to insure sailors

have less to spend during Fleet Week and more time
to perfect salvos that can turn heads. Indeed,

the current rate at which both manifestos and limericks
are being produced is precipitously low, plus no one

besides those daft with reenactment thinks to wear
a tricorne hat. Instead, stitched for three dollars a day

in refurbished bunkers off the coast of Saipan,
sneakers that enhance support without compromising

breathability leave sole marks on the reflective floors
in the new line of gastropub's paperless bathrooms.

Remember when all we had was our wits and a piece
of jagged shale? When a keening in the bloodstream meant

to hunt? Now click a mouse and dinner's at the door.
Not that I'm against evolution, but in a certain sauce,

progress tastes like regression, the construction of space
with natal ease of access, everything amniotic and near

at hand. In fact, I recently stuck velcro to the universal
remote control and installed a beer jockey in the couch.

Charity after all, like gingivitis, begins at home.
Plus, toys have become the new transcendence:

mp3s, dvds, lcds, SUVs, palm pilots, Pentium processors,
rechargeable digital megapixel flat screens, they've all

conspired to replace heaven with a notion that daylight
is a zero-sum game, fodder for the latest distraction.

So it spins and as they say in Malta, to destroy the web,
squash the spider. I'd rather drink beer and bust caps.

Hedged in by nudniks on all sides, what's a blade to do?
Moshiach, it turns out, is no fan of hot dogs or klezmer.

Ode to Quickies

Lunch hour. The time it takes
to meet in anonymity leaves
no more than forty minutes.
All preamble be damned:
hike up, hunker down, flush
the color of bruised peaches,
fall against casements in knots
of garment, tilt towards me,
so I'm exposed while you rove
a grove that grows in plums
with each sucked-in breath,
while wordless communiqués
flash between us, rapt to be
here, so roused beyond
the mere scope of skin,
only skin can suffice to hold
the charge of the rash
dance that fits the wan light
upon these chalky walls—
perfectly.

Blue Circus, Oil Paint on Canvas, 1950

"Mine alone is the land
that exists in my soul
I enter it without a passport
like I do my own home"
-Marc Chagall

Polymorphous saturation
 oh blue
 space, river without banks
 speculum mundi
 there's a cock in the corner
 banging a drum
 fish with a sly eye
head a bed for supple coupling
 horse in green, coquette
 lovingly decapitated
by cerulean shadow
 mane preened
 cooping up a man
 delirious moon on violin
flecked orb, yellow orchestral

depthless dancing
to horn, cello, accordion
ring-wrangling Mediterranean nymph
oh blue
lumière liberté
in a diagonal swath
a trapeze-artist swims
upside down, rouged
peacock crowned
belly round, breasts round
like purest prayer
it all ends in laughter

Sean Thomas Dougherty

Pas De Deus

“David Lehman and I do a little dance.”

--John Yau

Do you Merengue to the marimba, Salsa to the zither,
waltz to the wah wah co? Maybe you two

tango the two step to the Mississippi Watusi? Mash the potato,
holding onto the ladle as you belly up Break Out

in Electric Boogaloo? Or do you put on your red shoes
and Shock the Monkey, wear the carpet thin Running the Man

in perfect Funky Chicken? Do you Shinto on the roof
of a pinto? Look spooky as you bless the Kabuki?

Or do you both swivel your hips, side by side Boot Scootin
Boogie, or Tush Push a Cajun Jive, a Cadger's Caper,

a Jockey's Jig Yale'! Ma Navu listening to *I'm going*
back to Cali, Karim the Sota or polish up on your Pappa Joe

over Kilbasa and Kimche? Maybe you go Skinny Dipping
with the Chelmsford Assembly while sipping martinis,

a last Night Cap through a Fan? Unhook the clasp pins

on Ms. Pike's Cockle Shells. O Row Well Ye Mariners

for the Sham Hareh Golem is Tango Poquito—do you Lindy Hop
Limbo to Rag Time? Or dress drag to Texas ChaCha

all the way up to Contra? O Grinding the Green Corn,
O shimmery scaled Dragon Fan. Do you Stroll

in cerulean blue Cumbia and Mazurka the Morcamba
Bay Zenska Siptarska Igra Krozek Farmer's Quadrille?

Do you grind your Fandando? Do you Freak the Flamenco
on down to the Butterfly ground? Bumping Kinka

on Kpanlango? Takeda equal rights for Kenya, Zulu apartied
to the beats of the Pharcyde? When one is caught in a Twist,

blame it on the Bossa Nova, my brother. For tonight
is Louisiana Saturday Night and the beer is iced Polka

with Cotton Eyed Joe twirling Tamourine Une Piassi Ici.
Do you let go your Scalps? Do you take turns leading?

Do you shimmy, shimmy, *shimmy*?

J a z z Y o u

“There was beauty and longing, and Love run ...” Lorenzo Thomas

Jazz You with candles
Singing

A delicate ballroom
Of praise, a piazza

Of fountains, breathing
The whole weight

Of You: my mouth
Pulls deep to love everything

You: Schumann, Bach, Ella
Olives, a jeweled egg,

A sweaty polka. You:

Abandoned
Eden.

You: xylophone
Triumphant

Metaphysical
After hours

A-train bolero/ your spine
My fingers trace

Like drumsound/ like humming
Rhapsodies

Of Galileo.
You: legendary

B side: midnight ride,
Spinning

In the kitchen with a broom,
Methadone metronome mid-chorus

Kiss:
You: *Paris in Spring, Sentimental Mood*,
Slit

Sunlight, sadness, transcendental
Despair

In repair. Sequined
Circus

High wire butterfly, O my Polish parasol—
My orchid.

My thimble. My One

Syllable—

Michael Burkard

Construct of a Building

in the house there is a sideways k
and a sideways j and a sideways p

- each is about to be sawed off to
make room for other functions -

sideways because they are about
to be sawed some - not in half exactly

either - they are your application
and your supplication for emotion

of any kind - just take the dust
and the shavings with you when

you leave - will you do this to
night too, unto night

“U” of the Shadow

My friend Mary Hackett had a brother who died when he was very young. Mary's daughter Wendy was telling me and Maryalice the story one morning - Mary's family was in New Jersey - it was a Sunday - her brother Wendy recalls Mary telling was eating dirt - I thought that detail was going to have something to do with his death - but no - the dirt didn't come up again - as the day wore on he wasn't feeling too good - he started sweating and trembling and had a fever - they were in Orange, New Jersey - he was rushed to a hospital that evening but it was too late - today my memory says it was his appendix which had burst - I am not sure. Mary later did a painting for him called Unknown Boy since he was so unknown to her - Mary used to Wendy says always wonder and also was convinced how much different her life would have been had he lived.

Negative Space

I think Genine could write something today or tomorrow or the next day called "Negative Space" because last night at Sarah London's talk on the history of the picture book "Firehouse Max" Genine drew attention to the slide of one of the early drawings in which the negative space of the firehorses' legs matched that of the milkcan near a couple in the foreground. Sarah said she had never noticed that before. This morning while climbing the stairs Genine says I look like a man walking an invisible dog - I have my jump rope and I am just about on the street. We quickly conclude this would be a good way to get a reputation and also would be much cheaper than having to have a real dog. Genine goes in #8 and I am on the street thinking Genine seems to be in negative space and maybe could write about it.

N i g h t m a n

for Eli

I eat two schools.

I eat everyone after it rains.

Eat half of #12 positioned on the blackboard
like a door, still at school school.

Soundlessly eat a tenth of Vallejo's brightness.

One of the two schools attempts to eat me,
but like Eli I feign puking in the little
yard I am hiding from.

I eat the g in night
and the u in Jupiter.

I eat likewise the blackboard my father gave
silently to my heart, I eat it as a witness to your heart.

Crossdreamer

Pat and I are talking about the past.
I tell her about Tomas Transtromer's poems
and "The Blue House" in particular. Pat
hears his name in the cafe wind as Tomas
Crossdreamer. She says it once or twice
before I hear what she is saying. And I
tell her even as I correct her that she is
right, her hearing is right, he is a crossdreamer,
that describes something about him and his work
I had never thought of and never would have
if it hadn't been for Pat and Tomas and the wind..
I tell Malena that same night - it was last night -
she thinks this is amazing too - this new word
now, this new concept. I am late for the next
a.m.'s meeting but I take the book on Mary Hackett
to show C. who is struggling Mary's painting
"Standing in Front of the Big Me." I want to give her
the book or loan it but she says no everything
disappears in her house as if it is in a black hole -

I tell her that's okay, she can keep it for a long time -
she says no, really "You won't see it again." But
she looks at the painting and looks and looks.
Not before too long I have this old feeling maybe
I am the one who is supposed to look at this painting,

the big me in my own life, the mental me, the memento me (hey perfect - me - men - to) - no wonder I had misspelled it for years a momento - as if it was uno momento - or give me uno momento more - as if by talking about my poem "A Raincoat" again I could become both a crossdresser and a crossdreamer - as if the difficult rain had nowhere else to fall. Sometimes when I go away from myself it might be that I am going to myself in a way which I do not recognize at all. I really wanted C to keep the book also for my poem which closes it, it talks to Mary, it's about the moon, it is child-like to me, it wrote itself, but I am beginning to sense a wanting of something else in this connection to C. As if I could be the rescuer again, something particular about me, but this is something not to trust when one is hiding it or unaware it is sitting on the back porch like a dog which won't return home until you feed the dog something you don't really want to feed it.

Can't duplicate Pat's wonderful hearing today even if I tried. In Mary's "Big Me" there's a "Dog Died" gravestone to the right of the bridge before the bridge begins. It's just a few feet from the empty bottle.

Very Difficult Rainfall

The song said something close to "I want you more than anything."
I couldn't tell because of some overheard conversations.
Windows too looked out on the city like the words did.
But I wouldn't be there until rainfall hit, sounding like "anything" too.
It's your word against mine.
This isn't the anniversary of the song being written.
This isn't an isn't.
Just because of my mother leading me to write a poem called "A Raincoat"
isn't any real reason to have to talk about a raincoat any more.
But it becomes - doesn't it - a kind of place.
Rain falls on the history of a raincoat doesn't it.
You don't have to answer that.
One time I was convinced her sister was about to turn up in the next door
or the next town - in any case just ahead of me.
That thought was so insistent it was like a plot:
many times it's as if the sister was riding with me.

Derek Pollard

Suddenly while walking

There is a gloss
To the world
A pling
At the side
Of the head
With the ears
Set ringing
And the leaves
On the trees
Gone from green
To yellow
To red—then
Back again
The mountains
Made dusty
The sun
On the flowers
And vines
Loud and bright

Beneath me
And all the way
Through the city
The pavement
Is slick

With gesso
The color
Of egg white

Across the street
A woman
Leads her daughter
Along while reading
From a book

The air wavers
Smells
Of warm dirt

It is Monday
I think
The middle
Of October
And 80 degrees
In Salt Lake City

Muriel is home
The apartment
Only one block away
While I am here
At the corner
Of 1st South
And 12th East
Where for a moment
The world is made
Of glass

And there is
Nothing
But a mother
And her daughter
Crossing
The street

F o u n d P o e m
N o . 9

which may be considered a special case of tactfulness, involve

topics that are potentially embarrassing or other
reader, or both. In contrast to typical cases of
individual persons, taboos often concern topics
culture.⁸

In nearly half the scriptures mentioning women, there is a more discrete silence broken.

**This Sentence Is Giving Credibility Because
Freda Jackson Is Beautiful But Turns Ugly**

Alma Vidovic

The first dusting of snow along the window ledge

A line of children led single-file through downtown

This means that sometimes we need to let ourselves be afraid and express feelings of anger

The song refusing its measure moving toward largesse

Ourselves talking to ourselves

How it is

Alma

An orange rind drying on the edge of the kitchen sink

The ache of a jawbreaker

The breaking itself

By this statement he is making us feel daring and unafraid

Neon wheel above the Gateway Inn

Horizon the color of cilantro and pumpkin seed

Lightning

Alma

The mountains surely in their standing still

A single red balloon rising into the storm

In this statement he is using logic to get to the conclusion

Saying—what

Alma Vidovic

The very air

A-L-M-A

The moment in the moment's apostrophe

Abandoning the apostrophe

Reptile World

I am being led through a dark house. The hand holding mine is cold. Maybe it was a different day, but I remember a Sunday in winter. The hand belongs to Father Dreyfus, a Catholic priest from Our Lady of Perpetual Help where I study for my first communion. He is taking me to see my mother. Last night she was released from the drug rehab center in Elmira. She has convinced welfare to set us up in a railroad flat on the Southside of Binghamton, a town in Upstate New York. The electric power has yet to be turned on. The house is unheated and damp.

When we arrive, the front door is open. The last time Father Dreyfus saw my mother, she called him a homo, and now he slinks through the open door like a thief hoping no one is home. When we reach the kitchen Father Dreyfus calls out my mother's name. "Joanie, we're here," he says. His plaintive voice echoes like a prayer through the empty rooms.

The kitchen floor is uneven and slippery. Water has frozen from a leaky pipe. Frost coats the buckled linoleum like icy veneer. Father Dreyfus pulls a cigarette from his pocket, strikes a match, smokes. I move my feet back and forth like a skater. My mother takes shape in the doorway. She holds a candle to her face. "It looks like you're having fun," she says.

The dim light accentuates her paleness. A red bandana rims the edge of newly razored hair. Tattered jeans plunge below her navel. Toothpick thin and weary she slumps against a wall. Her eyes are open windows to the grave.

But, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's not winter at all. Maybe it's

July. The season is summer. A fat policeman holds my hand. His fingers are like sweaty fat sausages. We are rushing through a dark, dark house. My mother pale as moonlight lies motionless on the living room floor. Stiff fingers grip a TV stand. Bert and Ernie chase across the screen. She is nearly dead, and I am two. A cereal bowl filled with sour milk rests against her shoulder. Policemen arrive to find me feeding her sugar from a spoon. White crystals dust her eyes and nose like snowflakes.

A young priest from the neighborhood hurries inside, folds to his knees, begins to speak, "Lord pardon thee for whatever sins or faults thou hast committed." Outside an ambulance wails. A rosy beam illuminates the windows like Christmas lights.

The policeman lifts my mother's wrist. His fingers tap her paper skin. "You'd better hurry, Father. We're losing her," he says. In the bedroom I play patty cake with a social worker. My words are knicky knacky nonsense singsong. There is just the two of us and I am glad.

But, maybe I don't remember any of this. Maybe all I remember is twenty. Seated in a car. A sketch of my mother, bony shoulders outlined in a shabby dress. The man next to me holds my face to his, and plucks an eyelash from my cheek where it has fallen like a feather. "Make a wish," he says.

Michael Scotto

The Three Deaths of Canary

1. Fleming Smith strapped scraps of rusted metal underneath his long johns, in case the monsters came for him in the night.

Devil cars trumpet from the streets! Roll on by, you making Canary howl rowdy. Grab the fur firm, make the voice firm. Keep the voice firm like a fist. Only way they learn a damn thing. Whisper sharp: “Stop! Stop you! You don’t try tellin me what’s what. I clean the dirt in my own backyard just fine.” Don’t set to whining, boy. It’s just a little spitshine, don’t you go making no more trouble. Got to look your best. Buff the coat. Better than me, for damn sure. All about the look. And me, beating up on a pup. You all I got. My little Breadnbutter. Ain’t nobody can flat out a man with a dog.

I know this, I know this. I smell like the day after Thanksgiving’s shit. Ain’t got to remind me. Try to shame me! Bark up and down the sidewalk, go ahead. You know what they say, about shaming. You only making me stronger. More powerful. Be able to bench press a schoolbus full of nuns by the time you’re through. And bowling! I could hit a 240, damn a 260 on them boards right now.

And look at the Mister Businessman! Walking on by. That’s a real nice costume but I can see right through that shit. Son of a bitch is gleaming hot—clothes is probably made of radium. Got his secret police radio beboping around his throat. Blacked-out eyes and a briefcase full of brimstone trinkets. Play it cool. He can’t do no harm to a righteous man. “And how you doing this fine evening,

sir?" My steel gonna protect me if he try anything anyway. "You got any change, mister?" Don't you try and lie it away, neither. I smell that stink, motherfucker. I smell the stinking silver lines them pockets. We got Judas's grandbaby walking down Craig today! One for the photo album, yeah. Don't make no screaming.

"Not today." Don't even break stride. He just a tap-tap-crapping along like I ain't nothing. Creak them knees and stand before him!

"I got to buy food for my dog." Hot spot on the back of my skull. Hate it when that little dog looks at me like that, yeah. He don't know what I'm saying, why's he got to look like that, eyes glistened up, asking a question like? Don't you say a goddamn thing to him Canary! You got food too! I'm a take care of you too. "I say I got to get food for my dog! A sandwich, milk bone, biscuits and gravy! You Satan-sucking bastard!"

Oh, now everybody got to sneak a peek. What's a crazy man going to next! Well fuck em, what's he going to do next. He's going sit back down, pull a Wall Street Journal out his ass and predict the future of the nation. Shitty, heh-heh. Going down, and pop. No Journal today—mailman must not have visited those parts. Hope a monster eats that half-a-beard motherfucker, yeah.

Ain't no monsters going to eat my guts. Shine em off by the power of my smile. No, hide that shit, you hide them cloudy pearls. Straight face till I get my teethbrush back. Sons of bitches. Monsters make my breath taste like shit, yeah. Dog's breath. Nah, I don't mean nothing by that, Canary. That ain't no reflection on you. Bread, butter, bread. Spread butter on the bread. Be chilling in the Wyndham Gardens, no time.

"What you want today, Canary, a sandwich? Just another buck thirty, then we can eat fresh, heh-heh!" Really need almost two, but you can't scare the little guy. Too much pressure. Start running in

circles, then you get no coin at all. I ain't going to flair up now, I promise this. And Canary going to keep his cool now, too. Me and him, teamwork, yeah. "Just another buck thirty. Buck twenty, even."

Sweet Lord, look at that! She'd make the sunset jealous. Them thighs! Boom. I think she peeked my way, you saw that, boy? "Spare a dollar, little lady?" She stopping. Nah, you can leave them shorts right where they are, thickness. She's reaching in the purse, yeah. Reach for that bill, girl. Wrap a dainty finger round old George's wooden grin. Face a Lincoln, busted skullbrains, accepted at all turnstiles. Drive on through, girly.

"I—I don't think I have any change." Go on, Canary, work it. Do it like I taught. First little bit of fur rubs up against that girly leg, she can't help but set to petting. Starts petting you, she got to give us something, it's cosmic. Pet him, yeah. Pet, petty pet pet. Graze along his back, you know, stroke it like, just give him a little touch, come on.

"A dollar, two dollars if you got it. My dog's hungry. I can't let him starve! What kind of man would I be? He likes you!" And my! She's trying to dance with Canary! Crazy college girls. The waltz, meringue? Nah, that's a salsa if my eyes ever did see! "Hey, he ain't a toy, you know!"

"Hold him back!" Girl ain't no help no-how. Everybody knows dogs can't dance a salsa. Cray-zee. Scaring Canary, yeah. Should have taught him a step or two, a tango. Like some classy Paris pup.

"C'mon boy, give the girl a breather! Heh-heh." Look at that girl, staring me up and down; I probably look like the Terminator. I'm just a big old teddy bear, most like it. Paddington Smith. You'd give Paddington a five if you had it, no doubt. Look close, how you gonna see backing away! Shit, you crushing the bread! Can't smell me? No, I say not.

"Canary, get back here!" Girl stepped all on his tail! I thought I trained that dog to keep cool. Start running in circles, can't get no coin at all now! He's running out to the fuck piss crushed street skull oh Christ! My little Canary fur flat the wheat rye butter guts. Inside rope blast outside treads. Bowel on the streets oh those wheels that tank Canary blood didn't stop hit like nothing red at all. Black! Canary sandwich, salt on my face mother devil tank lips oh Jesus what, he's gone? Gone? Who's screaming? Close my mouth. Tires gone miles away. The girl.

The girl. "Oh my god!"

"Monster like the rest!" Don't even know what that means. Just words to make noise to make Canary. Grab the fur firm. Keep the voice firm. Keep it firm like a fist. "You monster like the rest!" Voice scratch. Making a mess of it now. Pick him up. Wrap him in a anything. Hands warm and red. Stick later. Canary.

Not Canary. Monsters going to pick his deadguts in the street. Smell like me soon enough. Girl is gone. Wooo-wooo, red-blue! Ain't that a shiny uniform? And a good evening to you, officer! Shake your hand another time. Canary, yeah. "Don't touch me! This is a no touching zone!" It's happening now. "You see the sign! Personal space, piggie! Look at the fucking sign!" Stop screaming. Close your eyes and they all be gone. There is no policeman. Dreaming. "Get off of me, you pig! Be no touching me! Touch him!" The girl, half a head in the distance. "No, grab her! She done the deed! Around the corner, she's gonna get away!" Fine place, this. Girl's a ghost now. No justice. Speaking into his black box now. Calling the black-eye radium man with the brimstone bag. Shouts to screams. Screams to shrieks. "Wooo-woooo!" Can't get away. Holds the coat firm.

"Calm down, you!" Voice firm like a fist. Only way we learn a damn thing.

2. Myriam walked down Craig Street, studying sidelong each man who passed her.

The wash! That's it. They must have shrank in the wash. Should have let Mom do the laundry. Legs are so pale! Everyone is looking. Corner of the eye glances, never a glare, just a peek. Tug em down. Doesn't do any good. They bunch back up with the first step.

Ooh, look at fancy Prada dude, stop in my tracks! Pardon me, sir, it looks as if some pubes fell onto your face. Goatees? Out. On the other hand, the art store. I've got six or seven in my purse. Lunch was four, and why can they get away with four dollars for turkey on toast! No I don't need new charcoals. Feet go. Just sharpen the old ones and a stop and tug. Everything's a stop tug. We won't think about it anymore. And we're off for real this time. Fix the eyes forward, nobody's looking at you. That's just silly. Fasten eyes on sunset palette. Lordee-loo, it looks like a picture up there. Throw a rock high enough and the whole thing'll Chicken Little on us. Blue isn't a Pittsburgh color.

Get home, put on a pair of pants, get dinner. The Grill? Campus food vomitous. Good soup, don't need an ID for the booze. Half price beer after ten. Thursday night, no class for eighteen hours twenty-three minutes, it'll take sixteen minutes to get home maybe play some Nintendo, look over Stats, that's about two hours, 16 hours till class and it's 10 o'clock. Four beers, Rolling Rock is an over twenty-one kind of beer, six dollars have to hit an ATM first, four hours for body to process, yes. Well then. There you go U.G., it's a date. Four more years till drinking with you gets boring, but it's only ten months till I can go to Iraq and shoot me up an Ay-rab, fuck you very much President Jackass. Get me a sign, get me on the march! Goddamn police. Hosed down Jackie at the last protest, broke his thumb when he hit the ground, can't play the

saxophone for me. Although, getting old with him anyway, he's like twenty four and still works at a coffee shop. Good, very mature. So shallow sometimes, you sound like Mom. Mom'd kill me if she knew.

Oh gross, cross the street now! Shut up Myr, don't. Don't look don't look stop looking at me. No looking at me, I'm not looking at you. Straight ahead, don't trip over him. Can't stop, you have to get home and change, fucking short shorts. A dog too, full of street filth dander going to give me hives if it touches me. It's not my fault he's there. Not at all. He has nothing to do with me. "Spare a dollar, little lady?" His smile's like a brownout.

It's not because he's black. Yes, stop. He's not a scary man, just down on his luck. See how he pets the dog! Ew ew ew the smell. Shit his pants? Don't touch me! Tug. Get the money, don't touch fingers when you pass it. Good job, first thing you reach for is the pepper spray. You are so goddamn SUBURBAN. Where is the money! Did he call me little lady?

"I—I don't think I have any change." Real convincing. Probably thinks I'm a racist, the bastard. I don't give him the money, he'll probably make a scene now. Give him whatever you pull out, even if it's a five. You've got three hundred forty-seven dollars left in the bank, Mom sending more on the fifteenth, nine days away and that's let's see thirty-eight dollars a day I can have Chinese buy my new Doc Martens and definitely spare five for shit-pants beggar. Oh my god, he's stroking his legs, he's imagining my bare legs stroking his stroking I have to get away from here.

Keep your dog away from me, Jesus! I'll have to wear long pants tomorrow, supposed to be seventy-five or seventy-eight degrees sunny with a forty-five percent chance of rain goddamn it. Fur's all gross on my leg, slippery coat on my calf, all that sick street mess on my leg doesn't feel half bad but oh disgusting. Jackie won't want to touch me tonight, take a bath nice warm bath and maybe I won't get

a rash, fucking dander. Back off, get off me filthy thing! What if I call for help what will that man do? He's talking now, I don't know what he's saying. Not angry, nice talk. Not angry yet. Yeah, your dog's hungry, ew, wet nose on my knee, dog drool on my kneecap gross! "Hold him back!" I'll kick your dog, I'll kick him in his doggy ribs, you ugly black son of a bitch. No I didn't call him Black, didn't say it Myr doesn't say these things!

He's standing up, huge terrifying going to take me in an alley sick maybe kill no, stick it no, he's still smiling those dirty teeth get a job you bastard. "C'mon boy, give the girl a breather!" Girl! Little lady my ass I'll show you little girl laugh at me little girl hope your dog hates his tail! Stomp and you can chase him now across the oh fuck! Oh fuck that was so bad I just killed it looks like afterbirth on the road hot pavement sizzle sunny fetal side so disgusting stomach turns oh. Knees scratched locked everything locked on the ground turkey toast something orange, why is it always something orange no food looks like that. Cough, breathe, wipe, cough. Tug. "Oh my God!" Get up, get up, knees scratched on sidewalk, everybody can see your short shorts now, freshman fifteen ass damn near hanging out.

"Monster like the rest!" The driver is gone, he didn't even get out of his car, traffic now stopped. Man's in the street, he's so fucking big. The dog's in his hands, blood on his shirt blood covered in blood oh God. "You monster like the rest!" Momster? Mom got to get help, got to get somebody, round the Forbes corner hurry.

Got to get somebody get Mom get a cop car, yes! Step out in front of course he'll stop I killed that dog I. Dog? Goddamn Jackson Pollock. "What the hell do you think you're doing? Move out of the road!" Squad car, perfect, thank you!

"Somebody ran over a dog around the corner, it's ripped apart on the street! A homeless guy, he's screaming over there, he's going to hurt someone." What? That's a lie, what am I saying shit!

“Watch out!” Flashing the flashers, blaring the siren, alpha red state prick, cool it! Rounding the corner, he’ll clean it up. Got to take a bath, change my shirt pants. Never gave that guy his dollar. Give one to the next guy I see. A five, that’ll be it. Tug.

3. Harry Wentworth, Esq., freshly made partner, sped down Craig in his blue Escalade.

This is the way we roll we roll, this is the way we roll. Hoppin’ and a boppin’ the skull keeps a rockin’ and shit there’s a lot that rhymes with rockin’, but forget it. Rap now, they make all kinds of crazy words rhyme because they don’t pronounce ‘em right. Early 90s, law school, hot beats bein’ bounced in the club, good rhymes hot beats incandescent women with brains to boot. MC Hammer, that shit was the shit. I mean, damn. The suit I wear now doesn’t mean I’ve lost touch with all that. I remember how I met you Trish, bitch. Shake the Coke bottle, the rum’s settlin’ to the bottom.

Trish probably gonna try and take this fine ride. Whoa! Red light! Haha, brake right, “gas left, yes yes” that’s the gospel truth. Sippin’ the Coke bottle, swishin’ warm in my throat so warm fuzzy tingle taste my buds brain swallow throat smooth yeah. Too much rum, though. Can’t have me fallin’ asleep ‘fore I get home, “ha-HA!” Damn it feels good to be a partner. Isn’t all that much too it, I guess. Bigger car, bigger office, bigger paycheck, bigger decisions. Havin’ the veal, or the mignon? Will Trish be takin’ the Escalade or go classic and take the Corvette? Green light go, and on and on. Whatever. She cheated too, I’ll drop that like a sledge if she tries to take my motherfuckin’ cars.

And the rum meets the Coke and the rum says hello and the rum meets my belly and ooo-eeee, oh. Redline! Drive this fucker

like a manual, rev it rough. Shift into neutral, rev it some more, back into drive and whip as the tranny catches and power on down the road. Get out of the street, you stupid punk! Fucking pedestrians. You've got the right of way, but I've got the right of physics. I'll exert some force up on ya! Vrrrooom! Honk! Yeah, you'll move. "Yeah, be afraid of me!" Yessir. No sir, I wouldn't exactly say drunk. Let me check, "z y x w v u t s r q m k," shit. Keep that one on the D.L. "i AM not DRINKING beHIND the WHEEL!" Yeah, lyrical. Just a bottle of Coke, innocent, sugar sweet Coke, hee-hee. Captain Morgan, who's that? Fuck a Captain Morgan. Trish is probably fuckin' him in the trunk of the Corvette. Guzzlin' Coke, guzzlin' gas, step in front of me and I'll flatten your ass.

Rev it push thrust forward cut the air OOOOWWW! Drivin' my Escalade and all the girlies nod, when you pull out the wad of Benjamins you're God and la-dee-da-dee-da and hmm, yeah. Makin' it up as I go, leadin' the life dynamic, true true. Freestyle livin'. Reach for the Coke and the not-rum additive and the "Oh, fuck!" dammit, pick it up stainin' the floor make it all sticky. Was only half-full anyway, lucky break. Shit the road, forgot the road oh fuck my head!

Steering wheel cracked me a good one. Did I hit somethin'? A basketball or somethin', make my car bounce ruin my suspension "Fuckin kids." Nah, there's no hoops anywhere near here. Oh shit, what is that back there. Not a kid, a dog? Part of one. Part of—

Liquor-breath shit gotta get out of here! Head is bleeding, just a tiny bit. Take it hard around the corner, don't flip fucking top-heavy monster squealing good! Anybody see the license plate? "No, it was happenin' too fast." Christ, there's probably parts of that dog all in the grill of the car. Fender stuck with fur bits. They'll use Coke to clean the guts off the street, Coke and not rum I am so fucking stupid no, keep going! Slow down. No one's following, good. Don't

draw attention, get home. Wash the fender. Have a sip to calm the spirits and it's not quite as good this time so have a little more until you get the warm tingle throat brain unfold eyes unfocus heart unbeat easy ridin'. Better a bit.

Siren? Oh God he saw me can't outrun a cop car with this huge fucker huge blue. Defend myself in court I'm a partner hard day's work officer you understand I dropped my Coke the dog came out from nowhere it was self-defense I had no choice he had a gun a rifle a sackful of nickels ready to strike so I saved the day by releasing his vital organs on the road. Trish is gonna get the car after all, happiest day of her life when I killed that goddamn dog.

He turned the corner! Turned the corner, home free goddamn you Trish you make me so upset sometimes. Turn off the radio, collect. Check-it and colleck-it. Just got to take it easy, make the right, make the left to Fifthave, go at the right speed to hit all the greens and you can get home soon enough. No one's lookin' at your car, wash it up nice when you get home and people will say at the office tomorrow, "What a nice car!" and I'll say "Yeah, thanks," and chuckle a little bit. Rum's gone, more at home. Enter the office partner-style, no blood on the fender, no rum on the floor, nothin' but you grinning the world off because you deserve it.

Home free in a minute or two, get the hose out and get to washing. Maybe I'll even catch Trish fucking a service man dishwasher repairman washing-machine repairman refrigerator repairman anybody dealing with pipes really. I'm usually home later after all, maybe escape free and clear outta this pre-nup bullshit. "Who turned off the radio?" Time for a song break.

Everyone Knows This Already

Defecation is the art of expelling used bits of oneself without ruining one's shoes. I use this to demonstrate craftsmanship. A train leaves point B, arrives at point C, locks itself in the loo for forty five minutes, then calls Telly Savalas to bring it a plunger. Telly, being an old friend, ignores the train in need. This is an act of love, not of war. An act of war would be shooting someone in the face. Their side supports the recycling of children, calling it murder, our side is more old fashioned, we believe in letting them grow a bit before killing them, calling it Tony. If this interests you for even a moment I will tell you a story about the cows my father used to shoot in their asses to make them jump back over the fence when they'd escaped the pasture. I use this to demonstrate fence building. I hope you know that I am lying, I would never wear shoes in the same sentence as Eudora Welty.

Bernard Haske

I Will Not Baptize

that baby
(quote)
you insisted
after
evening mass
my
no more shepherd,
named her
unholy
stained
whore
as
you say
you don't see
enough
of her
unblessed
mother.

Italian Lessons

Near where
Francis Scott Key once worked!
Near the ruined factories and mills,
near the ruined, beloved water

lessons in speaking Italian
are now being offered
in the stylishly underlit restaurant bathroom
in the old city neighborhood,

still standing, once filled with
Poles, Germans and Irish who worked
the mills, the factories and the water
and walked to work. They still live here.

Now they've learned another language
so they speak to us from elsewhere,
where we cannot see, telling us
very little, un-angel like,

in an ancient language still with meaning
to many of us here, yet entertaining

at this modern corner near the blackened water

where there is a history
of working with hands (and the rest),
when the water was bright and lit and full
and the poetry too was useful, and popular.

The Dancers

They're in their air
I'm in mine in my new silver,
w/roof.

It's their glassy median strip,
their runway floor show at the
MTV Music Awards, their

obliviousness here
near school on the west side
in this race crazed place,

one arm around each brown,
m/f,
all their other arms and legs stretched

every which way into
this unshared space.

Kids, please, turn one another
and touch
in any healthy place
here – amid the debris.

Beyond McCartney

In the interview
Paul said,
when he was writing
“Eleanor Rigby”
John
wanted to name
Father McKenzie
Father McCartney:
Paul said no –
I didn’t catch why –
so John
suggested looking further in the phone book –
beyond McCartney.
They found McKenzie
right there
in the phone book,
just a little
farther back.

P.F. Potvin

An Independent Question

On the taxi, hundreds of Chilean families dotted the fields that parallel the runway. They rainbowed their kites in dips and gasps, yanked flapping angles skyborn as picnic piscos flowed. Folk anthems of independence roared from guitar bellies, melting over the voices raised. From the air, the final lights of Santiago noosed out one by one. But the kites remained, persistently piercing the smog like a child enroute to Disneyland asking “Are we there yet, daddy? Are we there?”

Warholing the Leper

Whenever I glimpsed the woman's legs I thought about Nebraska. How endless Interstate 80 had beaten Warhol to the pop. Her legs weren't greenbean bulgy, snake sly or string taut. Instead, like the countryside from a car, she strobed evenly when walking, mummied under her t.p. wrap. I'd always palm her a thick coin for leaving Campbell's chasing near a bankrupt gas station, stranded as the pus that bubbled and styled her limbs, a black cloud growing ever closer in the rearview.

Into the Structure

She grew up on agriculture and her eyes were full of farms. In a glance you could see laborers on tractors. A little closer and mowers, threshers, strippers, and balers appeared around the pupils, each working a separate field. She had a brilliant insight into the structure of things and let them go about their business, uninterrupted. Folks used to say she could pick a shifting silo twenty years before the twitch. And all was content until a friend sold her on dancing in the city. Then her eyes went to smoke. She mortgaged the farms and blinked away nights with a man who grew nothing but soil.

Port to Uneven

While forking pork from the hissing fry, Grandmother told us about the sea. It was once smooth with soft curls and rode smiling on coattail blusters. The pasture above the bluffs swayed firm against the sea's pushing, but the rocks below were prone. Soon they started kicking. Their legs gave birth to the waves. From the pasture above, Grandmother watched the sea wage sneak after sneak to smother the rabid rocks. Over time their legs were smoothed invisible. But the clash continues, frothing a bloody white from beach to port to uneven ground.

One by One

Last night her grinding jaw slipped into my slumber. I awoke to the grit, rolled her over and remembered the man on Isla Negra. He chaired near the entrance, bedding a box with his accomplished sheets beside the whacking typewriter. After prompting he explained his tale, that certain dogs, using aura-sensing, can feel a seizure prior to human tickle or swoon detection. And I knew when I saw her cheeks twitch that an internal howling had loosed the dogs. They dug a hole under the man's words and squeezed through the fence, one by one, into hers.

Rhythm of the Bridge

Everyday on the walk to work I'd pass the no-legged man. He balanced on the bridge, propped by a pillar, shaking his cardboard box. Beside him his crutches waited like a *quiltro*, the kind of fleascarred mutt that would wag you safely home through the smutty alley and up the steephilled steps at 4 A.M. to bark a goodnight. When the winter rains came, the culvert beneath the bridge would swell, tickle the railing spokes, then gush between, flooding the bridge and surrounding roads. Buses and hustlers with umbrellas puddlejumped until the water halted all traffic. But the man stayed put, madly tambourining.

B e g g i n g H e r D o w n

She pumped fast to full-extension what he had started off as an underdog — spine thrust back, snapping tight with her thighs to heighten. As she evened the bar he recognized the laugh she roared in the space between the lag of chain. It was the same his mother bore. Louder than smack, the last time she spoke without asking.

Susan Denning

Diary from the Red House

i.

mine mine mine mine mine
again with lemons
and a small rabbit
again by the tree

back into the picture

mine the rabbit mine
the lemon mine his hands

the letters arrive
the children sleep
sliced dreams
all day spent looking
in the garden
lamb's ear
foxglove
lemon verbena
lemon grass

ii.

June 10th

by the time I got back from the market the walls were singing.
the children had been put to bed their cheeks sullen their limbs
ecstatic and I was alone
with the hare, so used to itself so safe in its body.

and me with my hands in flames.

I didn't write oh into the letter I wrote o o o

swell of breath fish's mouth gathering of suns
the painting without lines the body without

— *thank you for the rabbit*

red flowers grow
against the wall
summer continues

Black Rabbit and Lemon (detail), 1864

The rabbit won't stay in the painting
the lemon curves

where did she get all those canvases? this is speculation this is
jealousy
this is spite this is longing if you can say it anymore if you can
choose these colors

are ridiculous well what then would you say hare would you say
rabbit would you give up
has to do with ears the length of its ears
and nothing else.

how did he find his way into her bed?

did she invite him?
she invited him.

the palette was hers entirely.
it shifted over time.

this painting is from the later period. the tablecloth is in
disarray the light slides off
the lemons the shadows recede along a grid the grid is space
what else is yellow
consider your answer carefully

what else is yellow

a newborn	cake batter	pears
hair ribbons	calendula	daylilies

a woman stands in the kitchen and says what else what else

iii.

two houses. both with red roofs. one house is larger.
between the houses, a tree.
behind the houses, a grove of lemons.

past the grove, an open field.
in front of the houses, an overloved neglected garden.
somewhere underground, a rabbit den.

the dining room and its furniture was created
to suggest ritual
to suggest having enough to eat

white tablecloths
 cleaning and ironing
 damask and linen

July 19th

for a long time I've been dreaming of becoming something else.
the garden has gotten away from me.

you can't see *through* a thing — you see with it. The back of
their necks, when they were babies — I would put my face on it
and breathe ... how ended it made me feel.

and then the call of the colors, the yellow wing and the red
petals, black fur with pink eyes,
 me written there — a small inscription — no,
 I'm painted there — or covered there,
I'm in the world, not part of it, there's nothing there
that isn't me.

consider only the light.

consider only that we must be parted.

iv.

she has waited too long. you know how that goes. and the rabbit
is a poor substitute. all day it eats grass eats mint eats leaves
eats through every sentence the garden writes. it eats faster
than she can think of him. it sleeps in the garden between
the parsley and lavender and soon it will start multiplying
and the offspring will grow and graze and some will leave

the garden and some will sleep behind the wall and some will
end up eaten. the body should be more singular. but since
it's not, she should sleep without him and find out why the
painting never works, the canvas warps, the colors falter,
and the children or the garden or that field out behind the
lemon grove that makes her think *run* makes her think

keep running makes her think *run until I disappear*, the one thing she
tries to possess and hold in one fixed spot, ends up being
another example of her failure, of her body pushed back
and diminished. of the refusal of any form to satisfy her.

and the colors seem to hiss and echo, of the tree that grows
between the houses, of the flowers that hide below the tall
grass, of the soft flesh of her children's bodies.

yes she was a bride once, married to the marriage bed.

no. never married — not really.

v.

the hare is solitary	rabbits are gregarious
the hare sleeps on the open ground	rabbits sleep in warrens —
	they burrow
hares are born with fur and open eyes	rabbits enter the world
	naked and blind
hares have longer legs	rabbits bring luck
hares are mad	

looking hard.
she loses the green.
 she wants to see
 with her hands.

she walks into the orchard
a hundred lemons at her feet.

the children shriek on the stairs.
they drown out his voice
 then he's gone.

where does the green begin
some mornings she is all angles.

vi.

Do you have a rabbit?
He is a house rabbit.

He was never a house rabbit. He had wild carnation eyes.

I carried him into the garden.
How could I have known there were more?

Of course I knew there were more.

His paws smelled like mint. The children carried him into the garden. They let him go.

look up at the houses that fall into shadows
then lie in the grass
that the rabbits inhabit.

Do you have a brilliant eye?
I believed that you believed that I believed in beauty

unraveled
unstitched
unnumbered

that brightens and darkens
and dips into shadows
then lie in the grass
look up at the houses.

It moves along the leaves,
it enters
the branches. And from red roof

to red roof she watches
the picture change.
It's not the horizon she wants —

she wants to see with her body.

The flowers excuse themselves,
the grass ends.

vii.

Again: the small red house was for painting, with paint stains on the floors and the window never latched properly and there's nothing improper about that — so it's a stupid word — but the mice would get in and one of them once wandered into purple paint on his feet on his tail and fled

into the garden and his tail flashed through the grass. The larger house was for the usual things the making of meals and the rooms for the beds and the library and the sitting room and the dining room and the stairs that led up to the children's rooms and the room at the back where visitors slept and everything was divided up and yes I hung curtains in the kitchen and yes the maid scrubbed the floor and you accused me of being *one who has a maid* but I had the money and that's what I spent it on. But then the children got older and I was tired of going back and forth to the little red house and so I started sleeping there.

I don't understand your need for order. Dust would get under the beds and sometimes I swept it and sometimes she swept it and sometimes it just gathered more dust. Dust is mostly flesh.

viii.

what are you thinking?
I never think anymore.

what are you looking for when you squint into the distance?
new surfaces.
a feeling I'm being replaced.

look closer
get on your knees
reach your hands a little farther
what do you think you'll see?

if all you ever do is what you're asked to do then you will never
need to answer when someone asks — what are you up to?

ix.

Red Houses 1866 (detail)

in the corner is a long disputed corner in the corner of the
painting. there are questions about the painter who
painted the painting. most critics believe the painting
was painted by a woman and so of course it was her
painting some people believe the best way to approach
a painting is

to describe the brush strokes or they use words like *abbreviated* or
high planes of color or they comment on the content or
they say *astonishingly abstract brushstrokes* or they say *how*

*were the brushstrokes arranged they say rapid broken
brushstrokes but*

she painted this mostly in reds and yellows and all those primary
— by which I mean first —

colors but in the corner is a small bit of purple and the
stroke of the brush changes.

no one knows how long she lived in the house.

I wouldn't call them strokes.

x.

his hands reminded her of lemons but she had been reminded
of that before.

she refused to dream of him. she pictured him instead.

how still a life?

August 18th

I wondered if you thought perhaps I would fall in love with the
rabbit. I think you thought it was possible or was it a joke. I
don't want him to tame and relax in my house.

I have been rabbited. I have been up for days planning an
escape.

Up for a day or two, anyway.

When I first saw you — well. I have no use for any of that, any before and then after or even trying to describe the way my body felt when — no. Why create a history for anything like that? Why should I always be eventing — and placing myself somewhere in the picture.

There are other things. These things are mostly joy. Or unhappiness pushed so far that I start to dissolve, which is an effect that is hoped for desired and moved towards

xi.

somewhere in the middle is a texture like embroidery or the way something hardens right before it bakes completely or the way the brush moves across a canvas in a way that we call strokes.

somewhere in the middle she started to move

turn

loosen

inflect herself into

out past the windows

out past the field

an outside that was part of her inside

what takes place in the outside

is more than she could replace inside

the notion of being whole — of having
a whole self of being

entirely and only one thing

is not realistic

no one lives like that

xii.

No one can agree how to end. Some have argued end with the
diary it was what she said it was what she wrote it can never
be disputed how can words be disputed, while

the mouse in the corner says just watch me try. Others have
said but what about the paintings there were certainly more
paintings and who did she give them to did anyone pay her
she must have had money and people say what happened

to her children what kind of mother could she possibly have
been if she didn't mention the children more?

You don't mother your children you become your children you
inhabit their bodies as long as they'll let you they push you
away and they're gone. You put your face on their necks
you breathe and are ended. There is nothing there to be
narrated.

So she wanted to begin again.

That's what she squinted towards.

I don't know how long she lived in the house.
I don't know who he was.

and the gaze that invents the world, the gaze of a woman
who loves

and you can't say it like that anymore,
you can't say love

you're supposed to think in images
you're supposed to situate yourself
you're supposed to give something back
a sort of contract

in the house there was dust and children and after the rabbit
arrived more rabbits arrived which is what usually
happens
and happens some more

which was probably a joke he was making
why he gave her the rabbit I mean

I could explain the lemons
they're yellow.

xiii.

Child with Rabbit (detail of a detail), 1870

a remarkable example of a space that has been shaped
by a feeling

attributed first to another painter until the painting under
the painting was recovered

escaped

September 9th

the red hiss of the grass then can sound like sighing.

Simon Perchik

*

You lean against the way each evening
fills this sink waist-deep
though the dirt smells from seaweed

and graveyard marble --the splash
worn down, one faucet abandoned
the other gathers branches

from just stone and rainfall
--by morning these leaves
will lift a hand to your face

--you drain the weatherbeaten
the mouthfuls and slowly the mud
caresses your throat --you go

shaved and the gravel path
sticks to your skin, flowing
half shovel, half trembling.

*

Her death was reported for hours
on the weather channel
though it's not raining and you walk
slowly past the forecaster
who can't see you off some coast
the way a kitten just born
knows how to bathe itself
already curled over a saucer
filled with its mother and fur

--over the screen another storm
is forming, the clouds
come to an end, worn out
falling into the set as bedrock
never sure power will be restored
begin again as water
that will not leave the sea --she died

while you were petting the waves
still on the glass canopy
warming it, walking in front
letting it wash over your lips
so nothing can be said
that is not rain --her death

was on a map where a face
should be though no one
except the darkness that always comes
asked or held her close.

Tom Whalen

Language Difficulties

from *The President in Her Towers*

When I return to my cubicle, I find, slipped under my door, the following list of questions in a nondescript hand:

- 1) If there is no bridge or walkway linking the two Towers, how is it that the President can move so quickly between the two?
- 2) When was the Dean of the University Archives last seen?
- 3) How much does the President earn a year?
- 4) How many trips has the President made during her administration?
- 5) Is the President's apartment subsidized by the city? the State? the University?
- 6) What percentage of your salary in comparison to the President's?
- 7) What percentage of the annual budget goes into financing and maintaining the Gestation Chamber?
- 8) What are you doing in our country?
- 9) Do you know if the President will run for re-election when her term ends?
- 10) Do you know what happened to your predecessor?

Before I can even begin to file a report on this missive (surely from the enemies of the President), the Dean of the University Archives

enters and snatches the questionnaire from my desk.

An old form, he says, an old script. No one has had to answer these questions in years.

Then why was it put under my door?

The Dean of Archives is old; his teeth, what few are left, are yellowed and wobble when he speaks; his breath smells like cold ashes.

Oh, he says, all foreigners must see it. The form remains, even if the content has been long forgotten.

He rattles the sheet of paper in front of my face, then tucks it into his gray jacket's inner pocket.

Filed under miscellaneous, he says, then vanishes as quickly as he had arrived, leaving behind only the wind from his fluttering coattails.

These strange deans, where did they come from? How long has it taken them to rise from the ranks of professors? Or were they born, so to speak, into their position? If I were the President, I would fire them all, start afresh. But perhaps these old deans support her. This is a possibility. I do not claim to understand, or ever hope to understand, University politics. Bureaucratic weasels, my grandmother used to say. Nothing but fucking little snivelling bureaucratic weasels. After her successful novel, she taught a term at Radcliffe and could go on for hours about university administrators. Totally anal-retentive, she said. Totally eaten up by their assholes. All you could see when you entered one of their offices was the tips of their noses.

But for me in this strange land, I often can't tell the administrators from the professors. I can find no telltale traits between the one and the other, though perhaps the distinction, which I've yet to learn, is to be found in the cut or color of their robes. Regardless, each group for now is equally strange, equally

incomprehensible to me.

They gather in the hallways, these deans and professors, in clusters, like a grove of fir trees in a Swiss forest. They bend toward one another, then spread apart and come together again as if by an unforeseen wind. In their branches small animals scurry for their nests. I cannot make out what the deans say to one another, their voices are a low, guttural cawing. When I pass, they cluster even tighter together, their voices become silent, their eyes turn so inward I cannot see into them—opaque surfaces that reflect nothing, *sans* intelligence, *sans* meaning. But when I walk by them, their heads move in unison and they stare after me until I leave the hallway.

Perhaps they are considering me as a possible ally, but if they are against the President, if they think I could ever betray my benefactress, they are mistaken. But then why the questionnaire? I do not believe the archivist's version of the event; I do not think such a form is given to every foreign employer of the University. For one thing, I know for a fact that the Gestation Chamber has only been in existence for less than a year. So why lie to me if he didn't think me suspect or that I might suspect him? What byzantine forces are at work here? Does the President know this? Yes, I am sure she does, and that as I write, she is at work resolving them.

Alone in my white-walled cubicle I have reports to file, I must file reports, that is what I am here for, the President said, and reports I must file. I will find out what I can about this curious University, about the deans and the professors, about her friends and enemies, and, when possible, I will include what I have learned, overheard, uncovered, in my reports. The professors should not underestimate me or the President. But who could possibly underestimate her? Don't they know how, for example, the Gypsy

Problem was taken care of? No, this only I know, and who would believe me, and do I even believe it myself? The President leans against the window in the other Tower. She places her forehead against the cold glass. So much to think about, so much to resolve. No one individual, no single human being ... Her thoughts go back to her childhood, back to before her childhood, before her birth ... So much to do, she thinks, and perhaps only one term left to accomplish it in.

I can no longer see her, the snow is too thick. If only this long winter would end. Then, perhaps, the situation would clear up, her rivals and enemies would flee from the onslaught of the warmth and the sun. But it lingers, it holds like wax to a table, like the snow to the roofs outside my attic window.

I, too, lean against the window; I, too, place my forehead against the cold glass, but still I cannot see her. Only a yellow smudge of light is visible through the office window of the President, a yellow smudge, and something black, a black blur, a blackness stuck in the wintry air, and this blackness breaks loose, flaps its wings, disappears over the S Tower, over the gray shapes of the mountains.

I turn back to my room, to my cluttered desk.

The President stands in the doorway, snow still clinging to her long coat.

You're working overtime again, Thomas, she says.

Yes, ma'am, I say.

Best that you go then, she says, before the snow hides your way home.

::

If only I understood the laws of the University, then I might understand why the President could not simply fire all her enemies,

but obviously even the President cannot do that. Civil positions, I suppose, with a union as well; whereas my salary comes from the President's Special Fund, with the State supplementing it with health insurance and other benefits, most of which are also beyond my ken. What am I to make of the Undertaking Provision or the Twin Towers Compensation or the White Cloud Tax? These and other notations on my pay stubs mean nothing to me. And the notations change from month to month: the Betrayers' Sentiment becomes the Worker's Loss, the Place Tax becomes the Grounds' Fare. Perhaps my translations are awry, the language of the bureaucracy impenetrable to a non-native speaker, the syntax a fortress within a labyrinth. *Erhalten Sie die obigen Unterlagen erst mit dem Versicherungsschein, ist Ihnen stattdessen ein vierzehntägiges Widerspruchsrecht eingeräumt, über das Sie mit dem Versicherungsschein informiert werden.* By the time I have broken the code of the sentence's syntax, the meaning of the words have flown through the open window of its semes. The sentence is a ghetto of broken rooftops, a mouth with decaying teeth, dry river bed where scorpions scurry between the cracks in the earth that flakes away like burnt paper. But when the professors or the deans speak, no matter how thick their Swabian accents, I can follow them with ease, even though their language often is as complicated as the most abstruse official report. Or perhaps it's only their lips that I follow, their German lips that tell me more than their words ever could, that let me into the meaning if not the message behind what they are saying.

Is it essential that I report everything I hear verbatim? The President does not want my reports to be official; she wants them to be free from fear, free from the impress of the Towers' sway. I want your reports fluid, she said. I want your reports to state in as clear a language as you can manage the nature of what it is that interests

you in the University. Be free with your language, Thomas, she said. Let the words lead you where they want to go, not vice-versa. You are not in control. Certainly you cannot expect to be in control. You are my assistant. No one can tell you what to do but I. The words will take you down the corridors of the University into the rooms where research occurs, secret research, private discoveries that we have not yet deemed necessary to reveal to the public, our conclusions are incomplete, there are problems we have not yet foreseen, we have our doubts. In these rooms experiments are in progress. Report them to me. Report what you see, what you sense. I am as aware as any of my predecessors that things are going on in the University that are kept from the President. I am not ashamed to admit this. This is part of my job. I must let what occurs occur free of any interference from me, though I have the right to interfere, yes, I certainly have the right. But I will not interfere. Research must go on in an atmosphere free of fear, as must your reports. Only in this way can we ensure growth and development. The concept of a liberal University is dear to me, Thomas, as it should be dear to anyone who works in the University. But this concept is not dear to everyone, no, it is not. My enemies, yes, my enemies do not hold the same beliefs as you and I. Of this I am aware as well. I need your reports to keep me alert. Here, Thomas, in my offices, I am not always in touch with what goes on around me. You need not shake your head, Thomas, my dear boy, my assistant. Even I can lose touch with the University, here in my offices, even I can lose touch with the directions of the winds, the replenishment of which is the top priority of the Deans of Surmise and the Ode. They are in place, are they not, the new Deans of Surmise and of the Ode? Good, good. I need you to keep me alert to those aspects of the University that otherwise I would never notice. Soon your reports will be reports from the front. You do not

know what I mean, I understand that, but it doesn't matter at the moment. Have you been here long? It seems like only yesterday that I hired you. My previous assistant is no longer with us. I must tell you about him sometime. I had to let him go. Will the same happen to you? I don't think so. You are a good assistant. My speeches you have written have all been a great success, especially the sentence in your Thanksgiving speech that said "If I were an American, I would want to remember on this holiday, no matter how reluctantly, the horrors upon which America was founded, that genocide was not the exception but the policy." Yes, a fine sentence, one that received applause, and I regret you were not there to hear and see the effect of your words. More sentences like that in your speeches would be welcome, but not too many, Thomas, not too many. You cannot grow solely by offending. You must listen to the words themselves. They will tell you what to say, they will tell what is being said, they will tell the truth only you can report back to me.

When she speaks to me in her office, I accept everything she says, but when I come home to my attic apartment, when I sit at my desk that looks out upon the winter-locked city at night, I feel that the President has only been humoring me, that in no way can I really be of help to her Presidency, that she hired me only out of a kindness that I cannot understand, that I am totally inadequate to whatever task she assigns me, that I should write a letter of resignation stating that I am unworthy, someone else surely could be of more use to her, then clear off my desk, clean out my apartment and catch the next flight to Little Rock. But what right have I to question the President's choices? If she should put her faith in my abilities, I can do nothing more than try to meet her expectations. Despite this long winter, despite the rumors at the University, despite the strange deans and the mysteries surrounding the Head-in-Progress and the Gestation Chamber, despite the

difficulties of the language.

So I leave my chair beside the window and busy myself in my small kitchen, make another cup of Abendtraum tea over my small stove. The wind rattles to get into the kitchen, but the window is closed tight. Beneath me the other tenants have already gone to bed. It is late. I can hear the mice who live above me under the roof busy with their nightly foraging. I would leave them some food if I had any to spare. The times are hard and going to be harder. The President has insinuated as much. I must be ready for whatever is to come.

And something is coming, I know it, though I cannot say what it is because I have yet to learn the University's inner workings. Where will my knowledge lead me in the end? Will I wish that I had remained in ignorance back in Arkansas? Such cowardly thoughts I must never express to the President, she certainly would not approve of them. She would want me to face what is to come forthrightly and report promptly (and circumspectly) back to her. But what is to happen to Ihre Magnifizenz and her Presidency? And what to me?

As I lie under the cover of three counterpanes and stare at the mountain in the Friedrich print on the ceiling above me, possibilities terrify me. The mountain is grayish-blue, a pale yellow light hovers above it, but the foot of the mountain is dark with trees. Will I awake someday into this landscape? Will the President take me there? Will she escape the conspiracies weaving around her? Will I?

A night bird calls out, but no one answers. Beside me I have a stack of books, old paperbacks picked up from Tom's Bookstore on Rembrandtstrasse—*City of the Chasch*, *The Metal Monster*, *The Beautiful and Dead*. Sometimes I read them when I cannot sleep, or I turn on the radio and through the static pick up Radio Romania or Radio Moscow or Radio Ukraine, and listen through the night to

languages I cannot understand.

::

A low cloud conceals the top floors of the Towers when I arrive early for work this morning. From my cubicle I can see nothing but particles of fog. I want to file a report on the fog, a report on the Towers in the fog, a report on the enemies of the President, a report on the rumors of her impeachment, her dismissal, rumors of her assassination. But the fog lays its gray glove over my thoughts and I can think of nothing except the Towers.

These buildings are their own *raison d'être*, the President once told me, and I was left to make of this statement what I could. Was this on my first day at work? The second?

I was told to explore the buildings by myself for an hour, so I began in the basement. Black leaves swept against my feet as I wandered this dark chamber where thick pillars blocked my view into its depths. Stacks of insulation breathed in the corners. Somewhere I thought I heard the bleating of a goat, and I left the basement in a hurry.

The elevators rumble, as if they were the Tower's throat, and the building hums with its own meaning while the staff and professors and students hurry about their business of learning and making and forgoing the inevitable day when they must leave the University, that dreaded day when they must leave the Tower and find a purpose that is not pre-ordained.

On any given day the Towers direct us into our respective spaces, to the S Tower's third floor where measurement fields are being maintained and inscribed on the calendar, or to the fourth floor where the ladders that will rest at the base of the Head-in-Progress are tested for resiliency and rapture, or to the History

Department, *das Historische Institut*, for a class with Herr Professor Dr. Zurücksinken called *Von der mittelalterlichen Fest- und Fastenspeise zur modernen Fast-Food-Kultur. Eine Geschichte der Ernährung*, or to Room 11HT where a conference on Missing and the Constituents of Its Avatars has just concluded, or to the fifth floor of H Tower where a delegation of education ministers from Brazil are being shown the balloon prototypes, or to the 11th floor where the prototypes of mental hospitals are on display, each display no larger than a mousehole, no larger than a matchbox, a marble, a thimble.

On 4aHT I overheard one Professor Dunkelbach discussing a bit of Merrittian metaphysics with three coeds. "Goddess of the Inexplicable! Madonna of the Metal Babes! The Nursery of the Metal People!" he read to them, and the students scribbled away in their official notebooks. The madness of memorization, as you see, can never harm them, Dunkelbach said. They are immune to what afflicts us: loss of memory, of mystery, of delight in the mundane. Take this away, and what do you have? A music box the President can wind and rewind until the end of her days.

I wrote all this down, even though I did not know what it meant. A message in code? A message at all? And what did Dunkelbach's text under discussion have to do with the President? Strange words, I thought, but the President I am sure can decipher them. I pocketed my notebook and, without looking further into this curious niche of HT, continued my tour of the Tower.

I had read about the Towers in the University's pamphlets, had read: "Despite their geometric conformity and the grayness of their walls, the air in the Towers often is a greenish haze. When you raise your hand, the air clings to the hand's outline for a moment, before dissolving into itself again. Students and staff entering like windswept leaves, the morning swirling in behind them, voices of

construction workers above the clangor of the city, tram sounds, buses, the underground trains, an artist asleep on a park bench, the bench in search of the sun, of warmth, the Tower fills itself with books and protons, draws into its arms the city's dissonance, awakes attentive and without alarm."

But the pamphlets did not help me as I wandered through and between the Towers, hoping to understand the scope of the buildings, the dimensions that I would have to work within, the limits of my responsibilities. These dimensions I would only begin to understand when I better understood the character of the President, understood her own limitations and strengths, though when I think of her limitations I see an open plain stretching out to the horizon beneath which zebras and topi and kudus graze without fear of predators.

I know this is fancy, but it is fancy the President instills in me. She has her enemies. Predators loom just beyond the horizon. The herd is restless, they cock their heads, sniff the wind.

Only the custodians roam the Towers at this time of day. Her enemies are asleep; they are the ones who drag into work, refuse to meet their students. I am only assuming this to be the case, I have no hard evidence it is the case. The world wants us to acknowledge it even when we are asleep. The President's standards are of the highest of any employer I have ever worked for. At my university in Arkansas we had no such President. The president of my university was never seen by us students, whereas the President is on the cover of each issue of the University's newspaper, *Der Turm*, and the students have read her books, have heard her speeches.

When I am alone in my white cubicle and sense the President is not in the Tower (though she may, for all I know, be in the other Tower this morning, may, for all I know, have never gone home, worked all night in her office planning strategies to make the

University a better institution of learning for the students and the State), I sense the power of the Towers as they face one another, mirror one another, so that sometimes I mistake S Tower for H Tower and take the elevator to the ninth floor of the Sciences Tower only to discover that where my cubicle should be, there is no door, no window, only a hallway that stretches farther than my eye can see. And when, as now, the tops of the Towers are covered with low clouds, I can imagine that they rise far beyond the eleventh floor, to the twentieth, the hundredth, higher.

Plans perhaps are in the works for the extension upward of the University. The President might like this idea, but, no, there are no new ideas I can give the President. I am not here to present new ideas. There are no ideas the President has not already thought of herself. Of this I am sure. The Towers are themselves filled with ideas that I shall never understand. I imagine them staring at one another at night and during the day the Towers are asleep; they dream while we work, they work while we dream.

I wander the veins of the sleeping HT. A custodian sweeps the fifth floor. Birds flutter against the window, but the Tower does not let them in. Has the fog confused them? I pass the office of the Dean of the University Archives. His door is locked. I pass the office of the Dean of the The. His office has no door, only a curtain. I want to part the curtain. I want to talk to the Dean of the The. It was he alone who smiled at me when the President introduced me, her new assistant, to her deans. Not the Dean of Misalliance, or the Dean of the Seamless, or the Dean of Surveillance, or the Dean of Surgery, or the Dean of Misoneism (whose fearful visage and bloody beak I will never forget), or the Dean of Misprints, or the Dean of Heavenward, or the Dean of Constriction and Construction. The curtain is velvety. Behind it I hear nothing. Is there an office there? An auditorium? A screen?

It is the fog that has led me here. I had other matters to attend to this morning. I had come to work to file my daily report that the President will read, I am sure she reads my reports, each day I file a report or write a speech and I am sure that the President reads every report I give her. Why else has she hired me if not for me to file reports that will at least amuse if not inform her of the University?

The curtain hangs heavy before my eyes, heavy as the eyelids of students at a *Ringvorlesung* on infinity delivered by octogenarian economists. A hand reaches to part it. The Dean ushers me in.

Collette Labouf Atkinson lives in Irvine, California, with her husband, Peter, and their two bird dogs. Her work is recently published or forthcoming in *Santa Monica Review*, *Exquisite Corpse*, and *Points of Entry: Cross-Currents in Storytelling*. She is a founding co-committee member for the Casa Romantica Poetry Series in San Clemente, California.

C.L. Bledsoe was born and raised on a catfish farm in eastern Arkansas. He has writing published or forthcoming in *Nimrod*, *Snow Monkey*, *Story South*, *Natural Bridge*, Dartmouth College's *Lifelines*, and *The Amherst Review*, among other places.

Michael Burkard's books of poetry include *My Secret Boat* (Norton), *Unsleeping* (Sarabande), *Entire Dilemma* (Sarabande) and *Pennsylvania Collection Agency* (New Issues). Poems recently appearing / about to appear in *Smartish Pace*, *Court Green*, *parakeet*, and *Best American Poetry 2004* (Lyn Hejinian editor, David Lehman series editor).

Nan Byrne is a feminist poet, the author of three books and has won awards for her screenplays. Her poetry and fiction has appeared in numerous literary magazines including *New Orleans Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Other Voices International*, *Canadian Woman Studies*, and *Borderlands*.

Susan Denning has had work published in *Seattle Review*, *Redactions*, *Literal Latte* and elsewhere. She lives in Portland, Oregon and edits the online magazine *Caffeine Destiny* (www.caffeinedestiny.com).

Sean Thomas Dougherty is a nationally renowned performance poet, the author of six full length books including the book of poems *Nightshift Belonging to Lorca*, and book of experimental prose *The Biography of Broken Things*. He is the editor of the critical collection *Maria Mazziotti Gillan*. Recent awards include a 2003 PA Council for the Arts Fellowship in Literature, a 2002 Penn State Junior Faculty Research Grant, and the 2002 Francis Locke Poetry Prize from *Bitter Oleander Magazine*. He has poems forthcoming in *Harpur Pilate*, *Luna*, *Quick Fiction*, *Phoebe*, *Pleiades* and *Third Coast*.

Camille Dungy has earned fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Corporation of Yaddo, the Ragdale Foundation, Cave Canem, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. She has been a Tennessee Williams Scholar at the Sewanee Writers' Workshop, Artist-in-Residence at Rocky Mountain National Park and was a finalist for the 2002 A Room of Her Own Foundation Fellowship in Poetry. She has been published in *The Missouri Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Poetry Daily*, and *The Mid-American Review*, among others.

Bernard Haske lives with his wife near Baltimore where he works for the Baltimore Sun. Recent poems have appeared in *No Exit*, *Edgz*, *Zillab*, *Indefinite Space* and others.

Larry Jaffe is the International Readings Coordinator for the United Nations Dialogue among Civilizations through Poetry program, Co-Founder of Poets for Peace/United Poets Coalition. Jaffe is the editor of *Poetix*, the poetry magazine for southern California and writes a column for about.com *Museletter*. He has been the resident Poet/Host at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage and currently produces the popular Buddha Jam Poetry Series at the Elixir Café. Jaffe's work can be found in numerous publications and anthologies like *100 Poets Against the War*, *Urban Spaghetti*, *Saturday Afternoon Journal*, *Web Del Sol*, *Poetry Magazine.com*, etc. Jaffe's books include *Jewish Soulfood* available from Dead End Street Publications, and *Unprotected Poetry* CD and book from PoetWarrior Press. Salmon Publishing in Ireland will be publishing his forthcoming book *Lying Half-Naked in the Doorway*.

Andrew Kozma is currently attending the University of Houston for a Ph.D. in Literature and Creative Writing. Poems of his have appeared or are forthcoming in *Lilies and Cannonballs Review*, *Hunger Magazine*, *Cimarron Review*, and *The Texas Review*.

Mercedes Lawry has been publishing for over 30 years in magazines such as *Poetry*, *Rhino*, *Nimrod*, *Fine Madness*, *Natural*

Bridge, and others. She has received honors from Seattle Arts Commission, Artist Trust, Jack Straw Writers Program and held a residency at Hedgebrook. Originally from Pittsburgh, she has lived in Seattle for 25 years.

cactUs may lives in aUstin, texUs. His work has appeared in *Poetry Motel*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Dry Creek Review*, *Zaum*, *Touchstone*, *Owen Wister Review*, and *The Rockhurst Review*. He is an associate editor for *Double Room*.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poetry has appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. Readers interested in learning more about him are invited to read *Magic, Illusion and Other Realities* at www.geocities.com/simonthepoet which lists a complete bibliography.

Derek Pollard is an instructor at Lakewood Prep School in Howell, NJ. He is a Contributing Editor at *Barrow Street* and an Associate Editor at *New Issues Poetry & Prose*.

P.F. Potvin's work has appeared in *Boston Review*, *Passages North*, *5 AM*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Sentence* and elsewhere. His manuscripts have been finalists in the New Issues Press Competition (Western Michigan University) and the Poetry Center Prize (Cleveland State University).

Michael Scotto is a native of Pittsburgh. He is currently pursuing an MA in Literary & Cultural Studies at Carnegie Mellon University. This is his first fiction publication.

Ravi Shankar is poet-in-residence at Central Connecticut State University and the founding editor of the online journal of the arts, *drunkenboat.com*. His first book, *Instrumentality*, was recently published by Word Press. His work has previously appeared in such places as *The Paris Review*, *Poets & Writers*, *Time Out New York*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Descant*, *LIT*, *Crowd*, *The Cortland Review*, *Catamaran*, *The Indiana Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *The Iowa Review* and AWP's *The Writer's Chronicle*, among other publications. He has read at

such venues as The National Arts Club, Columbia University, KGB, and the Cornelia Street Café, has held residencies from the MacDowell Colony, Ragdale, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts, has served on panels at UCLA, Poet's House, South-by-Southwest Interactive/Film Festival, and the AWP Conference in Baltimore, been a commentator for NPR and Wesleyan radio, reviews poetry for the *Contemporary Poetry Review* and is currently editing an anthology of South Asian, East Asian, and Middle Eastern poetry. You can read an interview with him at jacketmagazine.com. He does not play the sitar.

Tom Whalen's stories, poems, essays, and translations have appeared in *Agni*, *Ploughshares*, *The Paris Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Georgia Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Fiction International*, *Seattle Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *The Quarterly*, *Witness*, *Missouri Review*, *The Idaho Review*, *Sonora Review*, *Film Quarterly* and several anthologies.

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analog:
Box 82588, Pittsburgh, PA 15218

digital:
www.caketrain.org

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